

Appropriations Committee Informational Hearing:
Fiscal Impact of COVID-19 on CT State Colleges and Universities (CSCU)

Monday July 27, 2020

Expenses

1. Approximately \$10 million of room and board refunds issued in the spring have not been reimbursed. Is there any existing federal funding source that could cover the remainder?

CSCU is aware that Coronavirus Relief Funds and Governors Emergency Education Relief (GEER) funds are federal funding sources that could possibly cover the remainder of these refunds. However, the state's certification to USDOE regarding GEER only identifies using money for scholarship aid (presumably through the Roberta Willis Scholarship or similar program) and for IT infrastructure. It appears that unreimbursed housing refunds would be eligible under the Coronavirus Relief Fund, although that determination would be made by the state as the primary grantee.

2. There are some substantial differences among the individual CSUs' COVID expenses, as shared in CSCU's July 14 presentation to the Higher Education Committee. Can you please explain why?

These differences reflect timing as well as variations in the manner of delivering services and addressing COVID-related issues among the campuses. For instance, Central paid a vendor to pack up student belongings in the residence halls, while other campuses allowed students to reclaim their belongings themselves. Similarly, Eastern used grant funds several years ago to add video conferencing technology in its classrooms, while other campuses have had to invest in more of that technology now.

3. Have any of your COVID expenses been covered by the FEMA funds? If so, how much? Do you anticipate receiving any FEMA funding in the near future?

No. We applied for access to the FEMA grants portal as a sub-recipient several weeks ago, and due to backlogs at FEMA we have not yet been given the permission we need to file our claims. We have applied as a single entity covering all the institutions in CSCU, and FEMA has verbally confirmed to us that this is an allowable approach. Given the pace of FEMA's response to our application for portal credentials, we do not anticipate quick action from FEMA. In the meantime, the state has allotted us \$5.5 million in anticipation of potential FEMA funds matched by Coronavirus Relief Funds.

4. Multiple CSUs gave space to emergency relief efforts during the spring. How were associated expenses paid or reimbursed?

Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) executed between the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) and CSCU for emergency space use outlined the CSUs would be reimbursed by the DAS for designated emergency related services. CSCU negotiated food service and cleaning vendor

contracts for the CSU campuses and the DAS issued the purchase orders. For all other expenses the CSUs have submitted invoices to the DAS who will pay the vendors directly or reimburse the CSUs for prior expenses.

5. At this point, what is your estimated amount of additional expenses that are anticipated for the fall semester and not yet reported to OPM? Please provide information by unit (CSUs, community colleges) and by type of expense expected. If you have similar information for the spring semester, please provide that, as well.

We are refreshing our data from campuses effective 7/25 based on an anticipated decision by FEMA to allow expenses through the presidential emergency declaration. We will submit any unreimbursed expenses identified to both OPM and FEMA. We will provide a summary to the Committee once that data has been collected, organized and verified. We anticipate that the supplemental request will be at least \$7 - 10 million based on incomplete data gathered to date.

Logistics

6. Is CSCU providing masks for faculty, staff, and students, or are they expected to bring their own? If CSCU is providing, what is the estimated cost specific to masks, and what is the assumed rate of use (e.g., provide 1 per week per student in case student forgets a mask)?

We are encouraging students, faculty and staff to bring their own face coverings to campus. However, we have also secured additional masks to provide to those who do not have their own. The campuses all have cloth masks on hand to provide five masks to all staff and students. These are washable and can last for several months.

We estimate the following costs for a four-month (one semester) supply of masks for students and staff, based on current pricing and counts of 81,000 students and 14,000 staff (this assumes every staff and student when estimates of on-campus attendance are closer to 50% allowing the resources to stretch even further):

Cloth masks for students \$263,250 (5 masks, washable and re-usable)

Cloth masks for staff \$46,533

Disposal masks for students \$1,281,600

Disposal masks for staff \$343,632

We prefer to use the disposable masks only for individuals who have forgotten theirs, and to provide masks as a last resort if students (or staff) do not have their own.

7. As of July 14, there was no testing vendor in place for CSCU and UConn. Do you think one will be secured in time to open the dorms, and if not, what are your plans?

We do anticipate a vendor will be secured in time to open the dorms. CSCU has been in conversation with the administration and plans to utilize a state-procured testing vendor. This information will be finalized in the coming days.

8. Given the concerns over COVID airborne spread, is CSCU planning to upgrade ventilation systems at the CSUs and community colleges? If so, what is the estimated cost, and have you identified funding sources?

We have upgraded air filters to MERV 13 or higher wherever possible and have adjusted our systems to introduce as much fresh air into the system as possible without risking mold and mildew conditions in the buildings or freezing systems in the winter. We are endeavoring to provide two complete air exchanges in each building after evening operations have completed.

9. Are there any unforeseen union contractual issues that could be related to COVID policies or response?

We expect unforeseen contractual issues as CSCU campuses and offices are operating in a pandemic environment. But we are coordinating with unions and meeting weekly with the union presidents for all the bargaining units that represent employees on our campuses and in our offices. We work through those issues as they arise. Where there are issues unique to individual unions we meet with their leaders separately and to date with good success. For example, given we have a minimal history with telework, most of the issues we encountered were around that initial transition and are now focused around safe return to work issues in a COVID environment.

Enrollment

10. How do deposits/enrollment at each set of your institutions compare to this time last year, and to the assumptions included in the FY 21 CSCU budget (10% decline at most CSUs except 2% decrease at Eastern; predominantly flat at the community colleges)?

Enrollment at the universities is trending slightly favorable to budget, and residence hall commitments are close to budget. With academic schedules recently shared to students these numbers continue to move as students determine whether their classes are on-ground or another modality. The deadline for housing commitments has been moved back from June 30 to July 31 to allow students time to make decisions about housing with full knowledge of class schedules and modalities.

- A. For the CSUs, are the declines mostly among out-of-state students and international students, or is it across the board?

The declines are across the board. Each university has a different mix of students, and show different results so far with respect to enrollment patterns among resident versus non-resident, new versus returning, and in and out of state students.

Student Services and Activities

11. How are your institutions, especially the community colleges, ensuring that students have laptops and internet access so they are able to participate in online learning? Please be specific: are students being directly and routinely offered a loaned or gifted laptop, or asked if they have internet access at home; where is funding coming from for laptops or internet access; has CSCU surveyed its students on their needs; etc.

The community colleges have purchased approximately 1500 laptops since the pandemic began; many of these machines are designated for faculty, staff and students to use remotely. Another order for laptops is under development and is estimated to provide adequate resources for the community colleges. This spring, the college foundations stepped in and provided financial support for students needing laptops and other supports. As for internet connectivity, these issues are not exclusive to students, as faculty and staff in remote areas have connectivity issues too. The system's library consortium along with the college foundations provided internet capable hotspots for use during the remainder of the spring semester. The system has engaged wireless provider services for on demand hot spots for the fall. All student based laptop and hotspots are delivered through the campus libraries, similar to checking out a book.

The CSUs used very similar strategies to meet the demand for student and faculty equipment, however that need was less than we have seen at the 2 year institutions.

In order to ensure that our students have a high quality educational experience, we've also provided extensive training and professional development for faculty this spring and summer. At the community colleges, 900 faculty participated in trainings. At the CSUs, 250 faculty members from ECSU, 234 faculty members from SCSU, 148 faculty members from WCSU, and 140 faculty members from CCSU participated in trainings.

Many schools polled their students to gather input on their experiences this past spring and their plans for the academic year ahead. Additionally, CSCU conducted a survey of student needs at the community colleges. We've attached a presentation from CSCU's Office of Research and System Effectiveness that outlines the findings of that survey.

12. Will your services to students – e.g., food pantries, daycare – be reopening in the fall semester? If so, what COVID-related adjustments have been made, what are the costs, and how do you expect the changes to impact students?

CSCU is making every effort to reopen food pantries on campuses. Food pantries are supported with local donations and part time staff or volunteers, and didn't have resources or infrastructure like the k-12 school lunch program to continue operating when physical locations closed. That said, we are very aware of the important service they provide our employees and students. At the time we closed our campuses, we donated all of the food we had in stock and shared information on local food pantries with students so they could access food during the shutdown. As we make plans for reopening our campuses, staff are identifying ways to provide curbside pickup of supplies for students that maintain social distancing guidance.

Regarding daycare centers, CSCU is working closely with the Office of Early Childhood to ensure that any opening plans align with state guidelines. The majority of children in our 6 centers at the colleges and 50% of the children in the single university center at Eastern CT State University are children of community members, not our faculty, staff and students. These guidelines greatly reduce the number of children who can be served by the centers so we are working with the OEC to determine how families in the surrounding communities might best be served.

We are also keenly aware of the mental health challenges encountered by our students both during and prior to the pandemic. Schools are planning for increased demand and plan to offer multiple modes of service delivery including on-ground and remote. These services will be delivered with public health guidance in mind. The transition to remote/online services may actually open up access for some populations who couldn't access the purely on-ground resources. The pandemic also offers the schools an opportunity to expand their understanding around health inequities, bias and discrimination, domestic violence, mental health challenges, etc.

13. If athletic competitions are cancelled for the fall, what are the financial implications for the CSUs?

If fall sports are cancelled, the campuses report financial one-semester impacts related to lost enrollment of athletes who are expected to transfer elsewhere or take a year off, and resulting revenue:

CCSU: \$360,000 (10 students)

ECSU: \$976,000 (100 students)

SCSU: none expected

WCSU: \$800,000 (100 students)

In addition, Central (the only Division I university among them) would anticipate a revenue loss of nearly \$500,000, mostly from game guarantees. Offsetting savings would be minimal in all cases. Please note that these are very rough estimates, and that a number of factors will influence the enrollment decisions of student athletes.

14. If finances allow, you are planning to hire 52 Guided Pathways advisors in the fall.

We are planning to hire 44 Guided Pathways advisors in the fall.

a. What will be your benchmarks for whether the hirings are feasible?

The budget adopted by the Board of Regents in June included a requirement that we revisit the budget in October with actual information about enrollment and operating expenses. At that time, we will recommend changes to the budget as necessary to limit operating losses to the levels originally approved by the Board in June (\$15m for the colleges and \$33 million for the CSUs). If resources allow for any additional expenditures, hiring of Guided Pathways advisors will be a priority for the colleges.

b. How will the advisors' work look different than originally anticipated, given COVID?

The work of the advisors will necessarily require greater use of technology in order to meet with and advise students remotely in many cases. Our existing student supports have been shifted to remote services and we anticipate that these practices would carry over to Guided Pathways. We had planned on using a cohort model for hiring advisors, including running an in-person training academy. We will modify these plans based on our ability to use in-person training at the time we are able to hire these new advisors.

Long-Term Implications

15. Have you modeled what will happen to CSU and community college finances if another wave of COVID necessitates that institutions are closed to in-person classes and dorms, for the entire spring semester? If so, what would be the losses?

The community colleges did not lose significant revenue from the transition of credit programs to online. Non-credit offerings in the late spring and summer were significantly curtailed, although these programs are self-sustaining, so lost revenue was matched largely with reduced expenses for instruction and materials. The colleges did incur additional expenses related to additional cleaning, supplies, and PPE. Expenses have also been reported related to computer hardware and instruction. This cost for the entire spring 2020 semester totaled \$3.2 million. We expect a similar impact would occur in 2021 if we need to close early, except that some of the additional expenses could be lower.

The CSUs however, did suffer losses because of the loss of room and board revenue. If we had to go all online in the spring 2021 semester, we anticipate the loss to total approximately \$50 million for each semester of closure. Depending on when a shut-down occurred there could be an impact on enrollment and tuition revenue as well.

16. If within the next year no vaccine becomes available that is effective over the longer-term, and COVID is with us for a while, then higher education institutions of every type, through the country, will struggle to remain financially viable. Have you begun to examine the potential implications for your institutions, or is that something you are planning to do in the fall?

The pandemic has brought on many changes over the last several months that we anticipate will impact our institutions long-term. For example, the move to new instructional modalities, including moving courses online and our plans to utilize the Hyflex model in the fall, are changes that will allow our students more flexibility. Hyflex allows students to change their mode of attendance according to their needs and schedules. Additionally, the investments in technology and teacher training will have positive effects on our campuses into the future.

CSCU institutions are fortunate that we are the most affordable higher education option for Connecticut students, and because of this affordability we suspect that enrollment will remain steadier than some anticipate. Additionally, many students who would have typically considered attending four-year private or out-of-state universities may now consider attending a state university or community college because of proximity, safety, and affordability. Further, the community colleges will begin offering free tuition to students who qualify for the PACT program this fall. Interest in the program has been strong, with awards being made to over 2200 students to date. PACT is being funded through the use of system office reserves for the fall semester, and we hope to partner with the legislature during a special session to identify funding to support more students before the fall registration deadline and into the spring.

We understand that a continued pandemic will have significant implications for our colleges and universities and we will need to understand where we stand in the fall to begin developing future budget scenarios. Connecticut's government and citizens have banded together during this challenging time to practice social distancing, mask wearing, and other COVID mitigation efforts more effectively than almost any other state. These strategies will be essential to our success in reopening this fall. We will keep the committee apprised of future budget updates and implications of the continued pandemic this fall.